

Madison, Lincoln, and Civic Education

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All political regimes face the challenge of preserving themselves. External threats can be dangerous but in most cases they are also obvious; the more subtle challenge is sustaining the integrity of the regime itself. In a constitutional republic such as the United States, this requires maintenance of political institutions to be sure, but also—and more fundamentally—the proper attachment of the people to the Constitution. Can such attachment be cultivated without undermining the principles of self-government? While democratic theorists in America going back at least as far as Jefferson have worried that enduring constitutional forms prevent authentic democratic rule, my purpose here is to compare two well-known texts that answer the question in the affirmative, James Madison’s *Federalist 49* and Abraham Lincoln’s Lyceum Address.¹

Both texts are covered with scholarly tracks, many of which are enlightening. Most debate on each involves placing the respective arguments in the broader theories and careers of their authors. Scholars debate, for example, the extent to which Madison was a sincere democrat.² *Federalist 49* is often pointed to as an example of his hesitancy to endorse popular will without first sifting it through institutional channels. It seems to be the clearest public distancing Madison puts between himself and Thomas Jefferson’s idea that the land belongs to the living.³ Likewise, most of the scholarship on the Lyceum Address involves bigger questions about Lincoln’s thought and political aspirations.⁴ Notably, Harry Jaffa gives pride of place to the address in his *Crisis of the House Divided*, arguing that the speech shows us the extent to which Lincoln was consciously preparing for the role of savior he would later play as president.⁵ Lincoln, Jaffa argues, appreciated the founding but thought it was incomplete. Not enough room was left for natural right, making the prohibition of slavery virtually impossible. Jaffa sees the young Lincoln making the case not just for freedom, but for virtues like magnanimity, prudence, and justice that are necessary to sustain freedom.

My reading of the Lyceum Address leads me to agree that Lincoln thought the founding was incomplete, though on a narrower scale than that suggested by Jaffa’s early work on Lincoln. I

would not say Lincoln was preparing himself for a future political role as savior, but I do think he is thinking seriously about the future preservation of America. That preservation, Lincoln argues, depends upon a citizenry capable of appreciating the reasonableness of the Constitution, and that this will only happen through a deliberately crafted and thorough civic education. This is not entirely different from Madison, who also believed that the people should be attached to their frame of government, but Lincoln goes further in calling for efforts at inculcating that attachment.

There are few defenders today of the type of attachment to the Constitution that *Federalist 49* and the Lyceum Address advocate.⁶ Madison's use of the words *veneration* and *prejudice* are likely to strike us as archaic if not offensive. One might be able to get away with venerating democracy or having a prejudice in favor of popular opinion; it is much more difficult to say such things with regard to the Constitution. Nevertheless, both Madison and Lincoln insist—at least in these texts—that it is the Constitution that should be venerated. What is more, they largely agree as to why Americans should revere the Constitution. They believe that republican governments are best framed by reason free from the influence of passion. Such governments are more likely to provide order while securing liberty, including the freedom to publicly deliberate. Reasonable constitutions, however, are rare. They insist that the U.S. Constitution approaches the standard of reasonableness in large part due to the favorable circumstances under which it was written that are unlikely to be repeated. They both fear, however, that people will not recognize the improbability of securing a better constitution, and too easily hazard what they have in search of something better. From this both draw the conclusion that Americans should come to revere the Constitution. Neither argues that reverence should take the place of reason or democratic deliberation; rather, both agree that constitutional reverence can support reason and republican self-rule.⁷

But Madison and Lincoln do not agree in every respect, particularly with regard to the means of attaching the people to the Constitution. Madison views the Founding as a rare moment of reasonable deliberation likely to be followed by factions passionately vying for power. Lincoln argues that the Founding was protected by the unique occurrence of a common passion that henceforth needs to be fortified with reason. This difference in emphasis when it comes to attaching the people to the Constitution leads them to have different assessments of time. Madison sees it as the author of reverence while Lincoln worries it is a silent artillery weakening the temple of liberty. To beat this artillery, Lincoln pushes a more active form of civic education than Madison

does in *Federalist 49*.⁸ Lincoln hopes to make the job of maintenance a matter of deliberate action every bit as much as the Founding itself.

Popular Attachment to the Constitution

The argument in *Federalist 49* stands alone but also makes up part of a larger discussion on separation of powers that begins with No. 47 and ends with No. 51. Madison wants to address the Anti-Federalist objection that the Constitution violates “the political maxim that the legislative, executive, and judiciary departments ought to be separate and distinct.” He spends the brunt of Nos. 47 and 48 looking at the experiences of the states, ending with the “authority” of “Mr. Jefferson” from Virginia. Jefferson, speaking from his experience as governor in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, held that legislatures will draw all powers unto themselves unless the other branches are secured in their independence. Madison concludes from this that “a mere demarcation on parchment” of each branches’ powers is insufficient. Something more is needed, but what?

The answer does not come until *Federalist 51*, where Madison famously argues that each branch requires a will and ambition of its own as well as the requisite powers to keep each other within their own prescribed limits. The two papers that come between the question and the answer are odd in that they deal with future conventions more so than the separation of powers. *Federalist 49* looks at the idea of two of the three branches calling for a convention when it perceives the third violating its boundaries, and No. 50 examines the idea of having periodic conventions at set times. Madison thinks both ideas are ill-advised, his reasoning falling primarily in the first of these two papers. The short answer, and how these two essays fit into the Nos. 47–51 schema, is that one should not depend upon conventions to correct abuses of power. As No. 51 will make clear, remedies to abuses must be manifest in the system itself.

Broader picture aside, *Federalist 49* has an internal integrity that allows it to stand alone as an essay. Like No. 51, it makes hardly any reference to the experiences of the states or the Confederacy. Its point of departure is not spurred by a specific Anti-Federalist idea, but rather an idea voiced by Thomas Jefferson that future conventions could be called by two-thirds of any two branches.⁹ Madison gives four reasons for opposing the idea. The first and fourth are both practical concerns, and indeed very similar: the idea will not work because it plays to the advantage of the legislative branch. In the first case legislatures have the means of preventing a convention when it

is not in their interest, and when it is they are closest to the people and will likely take up most of the posts at the convention. These objections might be avoided in the way that conventions are called and organized. The second and third objections, however, deal more with the principled reason for avoiding conventions unless they are necessary, and are of more importance for purposes of my essay.

In the first of the two middle objections Madison argues that conventions should be rare. Frequent conventions “deprive the government of that veneration which time bestows on everything, and without which perhaps the wisest and freest governments would not possess the requisite stability.” Governments rest on opinion and therefore even reasonable governments will not find it superfluous to encourage favorable opinions of themselves. It is not that people are unreasonable so much as their reason is timid and cautious. Their minds are reassured when they see that their fellow citizens approve of the Constitution, and all the more so when their fathers and grandfathers did likewise. Time must be allowed for the attachment of the people to grow.

Madison explains that we are cautious in trusting our reason because we know that our passions and self-interest often cloud our understanding. If we could learn to look past such distractions, conventions might lead to better and better constitutions. But Madison likens this to a nation of philosophers which is “as little to be expected as the philosophical race of kings wished for by Plato.” Socratic citizens are rare and it is therefore folly to build a system for those who love truth above honor and the common good above their own. Therefore even “the most rational government” will find it to their advantage “to have the prejudices of the community on its side.” Madison does not mean to suggest that Americans will be incapable of philosophic reflection and reasoning, but rather that most of his countrymen most of the time will be disinclined to learn why they live in a reasonable regime. “The Americans are an enlightened and a liberal people,” Madison said in a 1788 letter to Philip Mazzei, “But they are not all philosophers.”¹⁰ In other words, Madison expects Americans to be far more like Crito than Socrates, intelligent but not philosophic. This being the case, their attachment to the Constitution will depend upon the development of a salutary opinion in favor of the laws and frame of government, which is to say a prejudice—or pre-judgment—in favor of what has worked decently well for most people over a long period of time.¹¹

The second theoretical objection builds upon the first, and we are told is more serious. Constitution-building is of a “ticklish” nature and therefore not to be pursued lightly. In addition

to detaching people from their frame of government, conventions also excite public passions. The advantage of allowing a prejudice in favor of the current system to grow is that it fortifies people's reason. In other words, veneration is not intended to contradict thinking or deliberation. The two go together. Conventions tend to excite the passions, because they open up the most fundamental questions about our way of life, and can therefore be harmful to human reasoning. Madison defends the Constitutional Convention of 1787 by reminding us that it took place during a time of danger "which repressed the passions most unfriendly to order and concord." The Revolution, he argues, is still fresh enough in people's minds that violent factions and party spirit have not replaced the patriotic fervor that united the people of the states against a common enemy. Future conventions are unlikely to enjoy this type of concord and the reason that followed it. This interplay between reason and passion is a large theme, arguably *the* theme of No. 49. Madison ends his presentation stating flatly that the goal of good government is to allow the reason of the public, not its passions, to "sit in judgment." The implication here is that the institutional boundaries marked out in the Constitution will provide a process for the public to deliberate on policy choices, whereas the undermining of those institutions that would necessarily accompany frequent conventions could leave the public without a structure for reasonable debate. Maintaining the stability of the institutions is thus the best way for passionate appeals to be channeled into rational argumentation over how we are to live as a nation. But again, maintaining them is less the work of reason than the formation of a salutary opinion in their favor.

Lincoln makes a similar point about reason in his Lyceum Address. The speech opens looking for a danger to our political institutions. Foreign invasion is not much a threat; death by "suicide" is more likely. This would come about, he argues, if lawlessness continues in the country unabated. He calls this "the growing disposition to substitute the wild and furious passions" for the action and judgment of government. Lincoln offers these words only eleven weeks after the nearby murder by mob of Elijah Lovejoy in Alton, Illinois. To this event, no doubt fresh in the minds of his listeners, Lincoln makes only vague reference. Instead he recalls mob violence in other parts of the country, probably to avoid enkindling any of the embers either for or against the killing of Lovejoy. No one in the room was likely to have strong feelings about gamblers in Mississippi or Mr. McIntosh of St. Louis. Lincoln's speech thus talks about lawless passions without drawing the guard of those in attendance.

But how is it that mobs and the passions they generate are a danger to the political institutions of the United States? The answer has much to do with the people's attachment to those institutions. Lincoln speaks of two types of people: the lawless and the good citizens. When the first are given room to act upon their inclinations without punishment, they will celebrate the weakness of the government and work toward "its total annihilation." The good citizens, wanting only to follow the law and be protected by it will become discouraged by the lawlessness that surrounds them and have little incentive to help preserve that which does its job poorly. Their lack of attachment provides an opportunity for a third group, the "men of sufficient talent and ambition," to take power and lay waste to our political infrastructure. The best way to restrain the lawless and the ambitious is to secure the attachment of the good citizens.

Using religious imagery, Lincoln emphasizes the importance of the people's attachment. Every American is called upon to "swear by the blood of the Revolution" to uphold the law in every particular and to never tolerate the lawlessness of others. This commitment is to be taught at the earliest of ages and reinforced throughout life:

Let reverence for the laws, be breathed by every American mother, to the lisping babe, that prattles on her lap. Let it be taught in schools, in seminaries, and in colleges; let it be written in Primers, spelling books, and in Almanacs; —let it be preached from the pulpit, proclaimed in legislative halls, and enforced in courts of justice. And, in short, let it become the *political religion* of the nation. (italics in original)

He goes on to say that all citizens, regardless of wealth, race, or gender, should "sacrifice unceasingly upon [the law's] altar." So long as the people share a common religious commitment to the Constitution, internal dangers will remain at bay while liberty and order thrive.

For Lincoln, it is of little surprise that the Constitution has survived thus far given the shadow under which it was written and put into effect. The Revolution provided Americans with two fortunate circumstances that correspond with the two dangerous people that were highlighted in the earlier part of the speech. The passions of the lawless were "smothered and rendered inactive" by a common "hate" of the British nation. At this point Lincoln speaks as though this category of people were quite large since human nature is susceptible to many passions like "jealousy, envy,

and avarice.” These are all more likely to separate us from one another during times of peace. If allowed they will strike at those institutions that keep us together. As for the ambitious, the Revolution created an outlet for their desire for recognition and fame. These great men blazed their own paths understanding that their legacy was tied to the success of the infrastructure they were laying down. If they succeeded they would have cities and rivers named in their honor. Working together, the Founders labored under the hope for great rewards—fame, distinction, and honor. Britain gave them a common system to disdain and rebel against. Such will not be the case again, as new honor-driven men arise in search of their own fame. Such men will not be satisfied playing a game created by others. They will desire to be founders themselves. And they will have their way however they can manage it, “whether at the expense of emancipating slaves, or enslaving freemen.” According to Lincoln, this makes it all the more important to provide the ambitious with no opportunity for destruction by ensuring that all citizens love that which they have and desire nothing in its place.

Like Madison, then, Lincoln finds in the institutions of the Constitution the best means of preventing passions—whether they be of the lawless or the ambitious—from disrupting the peace and liberty of the American people. These institutions are bulwarks of freedom. But we are left wondering how Lincoln can explain the reasonableness of the Constitution in light of his emphasis on the passions of the Revolution. How can passion produce such a remarkably rational document? The fact that Americans were more or less united in their passions is at least part of the answer, but this is far from fully satisfying since having a common hatred hardly explains the appearance of reasonable boundaries for political life. The more compelling explanation could be found in Americans’ shared acceptance of the principles of the Declaration of Independence, which Lincoln understood to animate the Constitution.¹² The American people did not simply want independence or war in 1776; they wanted a government that would protect their natural rights, particularly the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, recognizing all the while that everyone is created equal. For Lincoln, the logic of the Constitution proceeds from these principles, upon which the Americans justified their passionate response to British rule.

However Lincoln understands the source of the Constitution’s reasonableness, he ends the Lyceum Address by reinforcing the need to have a civic education that facilitates the people’s attachment to the Constitution. The people have thus far been held together, he argues, by their mutual love for those heroes who have bequeathed upon us the blessings of independence and

liberty, as well as the political institutions for preserving these. Thus far every family had access to one of these heroes who were a “living history” of what had transpired between 1776 and 1790. But this history is slowly dying away. “They *were* a forest of giant oaks,” but even the best timber decays. What is needed now are new pillars “hewn from the solid quarry of sober reason.” Passion, Lincoln says, helped to establish the government, but it cannot maintain it. Intelligence, morality, and “a reverence for the Constitution and laws are now needed.” With them the “proud fabric of freedom” can be preserved for time unforeseeable.

A Constitution for Democracy

Though Madison’s and Lincoln’s arguments in favor of a popular attachment to the Constitution are given in response to different problems, the arguments they make are remarkably similar. Most obviously, these arguments come from the perspective of constitutionalism, but it is also the case that both are supports of democratic government. Both start with the assumption that democratic deliberation operates best when the ground rules are clear and firm. Liberty is best protected when it is properly bound. The best way to preserve popular self-rule is to secure the institutional structures that give form to democracy.

This general agreement about constitutionalism and the protection of democracy can be further specified by looking at five areas in which the two texts are fundamentally similar. The first similarity is that both texts hope for a government animated by reason and not passion. As Madison says, a good government is controlled by reason and in turn controls the passions. Lincoln agrees. A government of reason is the opposite extreme of mob rule, which indulges the passions without consulting reason. Rule by reason, both indicate, is the best means of providing order, securing individual liberty, and encouraging public deliberation.

While it is difficult to under-emphasize this point, it may nevertheless seem strange. For instance, the most famous part of *Federalist 49* suggests that we cannot count very much on people’s minds. There is no sense hoping for a nation of philosophers, and therefore we have to depend upon the prejudice of the people rather than their ability to think and deliberate. Individuals are often timid and unsure of their ideas without outside support. Lincoln’s praise of reason also appears a bit underhanded. He calls it *cold* and *calculating*. He also relies heavily on religious

imagery. Do these authors really trust reason to sit in judgment and hew new pillars for the temple of liberty?

The answer is yes—Madison and Lincoln do trust reason and think that it can guide human deliberation. The problem is giving it the scepter rather than human passion. History and experience both teach that humans have great difficulty acting on the basis of logic rather than their self-interests and desires. To build a government that depends upon philosophers ruling is folly. Instead, institutions have to be crafted in such a way that they cool passions and require deliberation. Such a government would then approach reason, even if imperfectly. Madison and Lincoln believe that the mind needs supports not because they distrust reason, but because they distrust passion.

The relationship between reason and passion is further clarified by the second similarity. Designing a government that is controlled by reason is difficult given the human inclination to act upon passion and self-interest rather than the intellect. Very few people, perhaps none, will be philosophers in the full sense of the word. Hardly anyone is fully capable of obeying their reason to the exclusion of their desires. If we could, then institutional forms would be far less necessary. Something akin to pure democracy would be possible. But both Madison and Lincoln are sober in this regard. As the former puts it in *Federalist 51*, “If men were angels, no government would be necessary.” The trick at hand is framing a government for humans to be administered by humans. None of this is news to Lincoln, which is why he discusses at length the trouble of mob violence. Because it is easier to see this when mobs are far from home, Lincoln considered it rhetorically prudent not to dwell on the Lovejoy affair. What is needed, then, is to move from the spirit of the mob to the spirit of the pre-established law. The first will too easily act on passion. The latter might not be perfect, but it is more likely to result in a reasonable rather than impassioned judgment.

These remarks might lead to the conclusion that the authors equate all systems of law over irrational mobs, but this is not the case. Explaining why not leads to the third similarity between the authors: namely, that the United States Constitution provides a reasonable frame of government that, though not perfect, is good. Indeed, this is Madison’s (along with Hamilton’s and Jay’s) burden in the *Federalist*, to show that the Constitution is better than the Articles of Confederation and worth adopting. He makes clear in No. 37 that he does not think it is a perfect document, but a perfect one was not to be expected. This paper in particular shows the difficulties of designing a

polity. *Federalist 49* is not as explicit in naming the difficulties of drafting a constitution, but that there are difficulties is one of the reasons for not having future conventions.

Similarly, Lincoln does not put all systems of law on the same level. Though he calls for a general veneration of the Constitution, he never asks for blind allegiance. He admits that bad laws are possible even in otherwise decent regimes, and America is no different. What he does ask is that laws be respected *as laws*. Individual policies may be misguided or even, to use his word, bad. These he explains should be repealed and grievances corrected using the legitimate formal means. Until they are changed, so long as they are not “too intolerable,” they are to be followed out of general regard for the system as a whole. Lincoln thus recognizes and encourages his audience to recognize a standard that is higher than the law. Without such a standard no law could be called bad. And what he says of the law would apply equally to constitutions. They are not all necessarily good. Yet it is quite clear that he believes the Constitution of the United States is reasonably good, or at least consistent with that higher standard.

We can say then that both Madison and Lincoln believe that the Constitution has considerable merit, but we might wonder why given what they have said about the weakness of human nature in following reason. The fourth similarity is their common way of explaining why the Constitution is in fact good, and both point to the Revolutionary War against Great Britain. Madison explains that a universal disdain for “the ancient government” prevented a multiplicity of opinions on matters of great importance from becoming violent. Though that war is fading into the past, factions and political parties have yet to clearly define themselves, thus allowing the Philadelphia Convention to conduct its business on the shoestrings, so to speak, of the Revolution. Lincoln also believes that the Revolution was of decisive importance in the crafting of the Constitution. Under its influence, divisive passions were “smothered” while a common passion against the British directed the people’s energies. Writing later in time than Madison, Lincoln holds that the influence of the Revolution has continued to protect the business of the people, though this is fading as its heroes pass away. Both Madison and Lincoln believe that the circumstances that allowed for the Constitution to be written as it was are not likely to be repeated.

If, then, the conditions for designing a new polity are not favorable, the need to preserve what has already been established—so long as what has been established is in fact reasonably good—becomes all the more important. As a fifth comparison, both agree that the prospect of perpetuating the political system depends decisively on the opinion of the people. Their attachment to their

political institutions is like fertile soil that preserves the life of the polity. Even the most reasonable governments, Madison explains, would be instable without the good opinion of the governed. And because it is unlikely that all will in fact recognize the reason for preserving the Constitution or any other decent regime, the general prejudice should favor it.

Lincoln agrees with much of Madison's reasoning about the attachment of the people and why it is necessary. One of the chief risks of mobs, he claims, is that it detaches people from their political institutions. Lawlessness desires the incapacity of government, precisely so it can be more lawless. And those who are happy to obey become increasingly wary of a system that fails to protect their lives, liberty, and property. The more the law is disregarded, the greater the potential for a tyrant to shake all restraints to the floor and do as he wishes. The best means of preventing both lawlessness and tyranny are to take great care to ensure that the people are unwavering in their veneration of the Constitution.

In all of this, however, it is crucial to see that neither author thinks that the Constitution is an end in itself, nor are such things as order and liberty. These are great goods, to be sure, but they are good because they are essential for a yet higher good: human life lived in accord with reason. As we saw in the first similarity between the two authors, both hope for a political system that privileges reason and controls passion. If the Constitution failed to procure such a good, then it would be an open question as to whether either Madison or Lincoln would push for the people's attachment. It may depend upon the prospects of having something better. What is clear is that they do support the Constitution and hope others will too, because it stifles passions and makes room for reasonable deliberation. In other words, it successfully secures the conditions for democratic life. Neither sees veneration of the Constitution replacing reasonable discourse about policies or even the Constitution itself. What they do hope to counter is the tendency to want to create something new in the name of democracy and in the process irreparably damage present goods.

Positive versus Passive Maintenance

Though there are striking similarities between the arguments of *Federalist 49* and the Lyceum Address, there is an important difference when it comes to attaching the people to their regime. In simplest form, Lincoln is more concerned about positive civic education than Madison, at least in

these texts. Above I quoted at length Lincoln's call to teach the rule of law from the moment of birth onward. No parallel passage can be found in *Federalist* 49. Granted, Madison has little need to talk about civic education in his essay. An outburst like that of Lincoln's would do little to placate Anti-Federalists' fears. Nevertheless, Madison speaks of the importance of public opinion without saying anything about shaping it. The impression is that it develops naturally under a healthy system. The longer it continues to produce decent government, the more the people will grow attached to it.

The difficulty here is that *The Federalist* generally touts human agency over organic growth. In *Federalist* 1 Hamilton argues that the world is waiting to see if government can in fact be created through reflection and choice, or whether we are forever subject to accident and force. In No. 37 Madison agrees with this sentiment though he also makes clear that the deliberate crafting of institutions is far from easy and often involves disagreeable compromises. No. 49, however, has a different feel. Stability, it seems, requires less reflection and choice and more veneration on the part of the people. He even hedges a bit on the Founding itself. It was a deliberate effort, but one made possible under the protective influences of the Revolution. Endless reflection and choice on our frame of government simply cannot be had. This is not to say that reflection and choice are impossible within the frame. Deliberation over policies and laws is required. But why will they be content deliberating on small matters and not the largest?

This is the question Lincoln hits upon in the Lyceum Address when he speaks of those who belong to the "family of the lion, and the tribe of the eagle." Those of the highest ambition will not be satisfied legislators when they could be Legislators, law-givers, founders. "Towering genius disdains a beaten path," says Lincoln, "It seeks regions hitherto unexplored." He does not see it as a question of *if* such a person arises, but *when*. And when that time comes, "it will require the people to be united with each other, attached to the government and laws, and generally intelligent, to successfully frustrate his designs." It is in preparation for those who find no satisfaction in filling an office created by a predecessor that Lincoln calls for robust civic education.

The difference between Madison and Lincoln is deeper than it first appears. Though they both think the Constitution establishes a reasonable government, they disagree as to whether the founding is best characterized by reason or passion. Not surprisingly, the founder Madison understands the Constitution to be not just a reasonable document, but the product of reason. He has good evidence for this. No one was more eager or attentive at the convention, and no one took

such assiduous notes on the proceedings. We know from those notes that, while passions and sectional differences surely did burn at the convention, reasonable compromises were consistently reached. This does not mean everyone was satisfied with those compromises, not even Madison. But without the strong influence of reason, deliberation and compromise are impossible.

Lincoln would not dispute that reason beat out passion at the convention, but he does suggest rather directly that the convention deliberated successfully because the delegates were still under a common passion against Britain. During times of peace, Lincoln expects the baser passions of human nature to have their influence. External dangers have the advantage of uniting our interests against a common foe. The common disdain of an enemy not only stifled “the basest principles of our nature,” it also caused these otherwise harmful passions to “become the active agents in the advancement of the noblest of cause—that of establishing and maintaining civil and religious liberty.” Lincoln’s position is that the Revolution did not free the founders from their passions so much as directed them to a common good.

On one hand, Madison’s and Lincoln’s accounts of the founding are not all that different. Both recognize that ordinary passions were superseded by the passions of the war, and both saw the product of the 1787 convention as a document capable of sustaining reasonable government. The difference is more pronounced when one looks ahead to their recommendations for maintaining that document. Madison sees the founding as uniquely reasonable and believes it must be sustained by relying on a patriotic passion. He speaks of veneration as a “prejudice,” which by definition lacks judgment. Lincoln, in emphasizing the spiritedness of the Revolution, argues that patriotism can only be maintained if it is supplied with intelligence. Unlike passions, however, intellectual habits do not arise of their own volition. They have to be cultivated and taught. Succinctly put, Madison calls for veneration in order to support reason while Lincoln hopes reason will keep alive the spirit of veneration.

This difference accounts for their differing remarks about time. Madison says that time bestows reverence on everything, even constitutions. Lincoln sees time as silent artillery aimed at the regime’s pillars. What will we get if we allow time to do its work? Madison hopes to see a people attached to their political institutions while Lincoln argues we will get a crumbled edifice unlikely to attract support from anyone except lawless mobsters and ambitious tyrants. Madison might be right if the Constitution fulfills a natural need for Americans, or—to be Aristotelian about it—if it helps them fulfill their natures. Happy citizens will likely be attached to that which facilitates their

happiness, and time is the best test of its success. But Madison is never this Aristotelian. Nor is it easy to argue that the Constitution is as natural as the Greek *polis*. From this perspective, Lincoln seems right in viewing the Constitution as an edifice that requires deliberate upkeep. Civic education is necessary to combat the effects of time.

Teaching the Reasonable Constitution

Lincoln's call for an active role in maintaining our political institutions by way of civic education eases the tension in *The Federalist Papers* between a constitution crafted through reflection and choice on one hand and venerably accepted on the other. The type of civic education that Lincoln is calling for is not one of blind faith, but one that elevates reason and makes reflection and choice continually meaningful. He is opening for himself and future generations a space for human agency that is on par with that enjoyed by Madison and the founders.

By opening up such a space, Lincoln hopes to resolve the problem of ambition in a regime governed by a written constitution. He recognizes in his address that the founders were men of ambition whose reputations were tied to the success of their experiment. They triumphed and "thousands have won their deathless names in making it so." The problem with their victory is that it leaves nothing but desk work for posterity, nothing to satisfy those with ambition on the same scale as the founders. Men like Lincoln were born too late to be founders. Now what? There is "*no distinction* in adding story to story, upon the monuments of fame, erected to the memory of others." The passive maintenance hinted at in *Federalist 49* will be particularly dreary to those eager to earn the praise of their countrymen. The trick is to find room for these souls to make a name for themselves without endangering the regime.

Lincoln's solution, at least in the Lyceum Address, is to make civic education a means of active maintenance. For this to work the assumption has to be that the Constitution is reasonable and that it has its own internal logic discernable through human effort. This assumption does not preclude Lincoln's argument that the founding was animated by passion. That passion is what allowed for a constitution of logic to be written. So long as a patriotic fervor lived through the "living history" of Revolutionary War heroes, the preservation of the polity did not depend upon Americans' understanding of its logic. As the founding generation dies, however, the passions of the Revolution cannot keep the system afloat. Lincoln has to find something exciting about being born

too late. He finds it in the fact that his is the first generation freed from the spirit of 1776 so as to appreciate the Constitution on the basis of reason rather than passion.

What is exciting is that there is much to discover in the Constitution. Though a relatively short document, it is a boundless frontier for the mind. Its ambiguities are like deep caverns to be explored. The tensions within it create puzzles and riddles for the intellect to ponder. It calls for interpretation, yet it has a discernable meaning. How its words apply to new or changing circumstances will be the subject of much debate. And there is honor to be found in getting it right and convincing one's peers of some new insight. When viewed properly, it yields a field of glory always open to a harvest. Is this enough for those of the highest ambition? Would an Alexander or Caesar be satisfied with a Supreme Court appointment? Probably not. But towering genius will always disdain beaten paths. The real question is whether most Americans understand the Constitution as a reasonable document with a subtle logic worthy of careful study. If so, then those of the tribe of the eagle will find it difficult to damage the institutions that protect peace and liberty, because the people would recognize any such attempt as dangerous, illegitimate, and unreasonable.

The type of civic education Lincoln is calling for then is not one that will produce a blind faith, a willingness to follow the Constitution no matter the consequences. To be sure, he does think a faith in the document is crucial, but not the sort of faith that refuses to ask questions. It is a belief that probes, a faith seeking reason. What is to be believed is not that the Constitution was divinely inspired, but that it was the work of reasonable human beings, and he would have us trust in its reasonableness. Even those clauses known to be the result of compromise are to be viewed as having a logic to them. This is because the Constitution is to be viewed as the product of a deliberative reason rather than the outcome of any one person's or faction's desire. It is this reason that Lincoln hopes will hold the attachment of the people.

One of the key benefits of elevating the Constitution's reason, particularly given our debates today, is that it eases the apparent dichotomy between constitutionalism and democracy. Much of democratic theory looks upon established constitutions as arbitrarily imposed by generations long put to rest. From this perspective attachment to an old constitution is an irrational holding-on to the familiar that has to be overcome if democracy is to work. Various democratic roadblocks might be pointed out to show the distrust founders had in popular majorities. And certain passages from *Federalist 49* do little to calm these fears. Lincoln's active maintenance should be welcomed for cooling this debate. He insists that the Constitution is not arbitrary. Democracy at its best should

also result in reasonable rather than arbitrary outcomes, and the Constitution's purpose is to help American politics achieve this end.

Madison and Lincoln thus agree that if we want to keep democracy we should be attached to the Constitution that frames it. From their standpoint, democracy works best when it is limited and more effort should be spent understanding how those limits make democracy work. Lincoln goes further in this regard than Madison. He does not think people would form attachments to those limits on their own. Reverence is not organic; it must be cultivated. Yet neither he nor Madison would say that this veneration replaces the mind's capacity to think about politics in America. Rather, both agree that the attachment of the people to their political institutions is a precondition for reasonable government and therefore should be viewed in a positive light.

Notes

1. Both of these texts are easily accessible. My references can be found in Madison 1999 and Lincoln 2009.
2. Compare, for example, Matthews 2005 and Sheehan 2009.
3. See Gish and Klinghard 2012, as well as Rakove 1999.
4. The Lyceum Address is a classic for psychoanalysis. For a brief review of these, see Curry 2005.
5. Jaffa 1959, 183–232. Jaffa moderates his position about the character of the American Founding in Jaffa 2004.
6. See, for example, Ackerman 1991 and Levinson 2011.
7. Madison might be the harder case here, though Jeremy D. Bailey helpfully shows how the Madisonian case for reverence does not undermine deliberation; see Bailey 2012. See also Manzer 2001.

8. Colleen A. Sheehan and Alan Gibson take opposing views on Madison and civic education. I am open to Sheehan's argument that Madison favored it, but in comparing *Federalist 49* with the Lyceum Address, Lincoln takes a direct stand on the issue in connection with institutional maintenance. For an exchange between Sheehan and Gibson see Gibson 2005a, Gibson 2005b, and Sheehan 2005.
9. Jefferson did not make this suggestion with reference to the United States Constitution, but the Virginia Constitution. Madison treats it, however, as a suggestion that could be applied to the U.S. Constitution in order to address the importance of longevity for the proposed plan of government.
10. Madison 1977.
11. Corrections and additions to this paragraph are greatly indebted to the suggestions given by an anonymous reviewer, to whom I am most grateful.
12. The most telling example of the connection Lincoln sees between the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution comes in his January 1861 reflection that the Declaration is an apple of gold adorned and protected by the Constitution. See Lincoln 1953, 4: 168–169.

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